

The Warps and Wefts of Knowledge Creation: A Case of Kente Weaving

Keywords: Knowledge flow, Information sharing, Communities of practice

Introduction and Background. Systematic knowledge flow and information sharing practices have existed in African societies for ages. Traditionally, knowledge sharing among individuals was done orally (Alemna and Sam, 2006). Communities were the custodians of knowledge, and knowledge could only flow through social networks. Individuals had to join a group such as a market women's association, ethnic unions, social clubs etc. in order gain access to ideas, skills, and expertise (Wilson, 1987). In many ways, "it is social networks that capture local knowledge and circulate it within the communities" (Moyi 2003, p.233). In this study, we studied how traditional and new knowledge flows in a Kente-weaving village named Bonwire, the home of the Ashanti Kente Cloth in Ghana, and how this knowledge flow results in the creation of new knowledge within this community. Kente weaving can be said to be a knowledge-intensive art where various stakeholders have expert knowledge and play specialised roles. An understanding of this knowledge flow in our contemporary information society is important in understanding knowledge creation in general and also in understanding the function of traditional social networks in our digital society.

Methodology. This study-in-progress employs Lave and Wenger (1991)'s Community of Practice (CoP) theory as the theoretical framework and uses social constructionism as the research paradigm. It uses multiple case studies as its research design, where each case consists of a set of participants who have expert knowledge about Kente from a specific perspective and play different key roles in the Kente weaving value chain. In each of the cases, we studied knowledge flow among Kente weavers, sellers, fashion designers, consumers, and tailors. Semi-structured interviews with all entities in the Kente weaving chain from weavers to consumers were used to gather data.

Findings. Initial results show that knowledge about Kente flows from the family, mostly from the elders. It is part of the socialisation process of individuals in the community, and is also tied up with their identity as Ghanaians. Additionally, such knowledge flows also involve friendship groups and social media. When a weaver creates a new pattern, the person teaches it to the members of their own group. Also, some formal education and apprenticeships have been used to transfer knowledge about Kente. This knowledge flow results in the creation of new knowledge as new Kente patterns have emerged as a result of the exchange of ideas between a weaver and a seller, a weaver and a consumer, a seller and a consumer, or a weaver and another weaver. Digital social media also plays a part in this process, especially as the sellers, designers, and buyers do not all live in Bonwire but are spread globally.

Conclusions. From our initial findings, it appears that a CoP is central to maintaining the knowledge flow related to Kente, and also aids in the creation and sharing of new knowledge. In CoP's around Kente, it is difficult to demarcate the boundaries of the community, for they are embedded in local knowledge but also enriched by global exposure. Furthermore, in such communities, socialisation, family, friends and groups are the loci for the creation of new knowledge and sharing of information and knowledge.

References

- Alemna, A. A., & Sam, J. (2006). Critical issues in information and communication technologies for rural development in Ghana. *Information development*, 22(4): 236-241.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Moyi, E. D. (2003). Networks, information and small enterprises: New technologies and the ambiguity of empowerment, *Information Technology for Development*, 10(4): 221-232.
- Wilson, D. (1987). Traditional systems of communication in modern African development: An analytical viewpoint. *Africa Media Review*, 1(2):87-104.